ISSUE 12 | JULY 2018

ARANYA

HYDERABAD BIRDING PALS | FRIENDS OF FLORA & FAUNA

Monsoon Calling

Editors
Ajinkya Supekar
Sriram Reddy
Phani Krishna Ravi
Gopalakrishna Iyer
Ashis Kumar Pradhan
Hari Krishna Adepu

Proofing
Husein Latif
Manjula Desai

Content Contributors
Samarth Bharadwaj
Sumant Bhattacharjee
Ajinkya Supekar
Subrata Kool
Sriram Reddy
B Krishna Mohan
Fareed Mohmed

Cover Image
Painted Francolin
By Kushal Adaki

Back Cover
Indian Pitta
By Sriram Reddy

Images used are the copyright of photographers

For Feedback and Contributions, Contact us

hbparanya@gmail.com
hyderabadbirdingpals@gmail.com
www.hyderabadbirdingpals.com
@hydbirdingpals
HyderabadBirdingPals
HBP Birdwalks

In this issue

This issue sees Aranya celebrate its 1st anniversary and is a very special occasion for all of us at HBP. We started this e-magazine to showcase what we enjoy doing the most and we're proud to see how far it has come. It almost seems like it was a few months ago that we were debating what to call this publication. The name incidentally was given by Jeet Aman whose suggestion was unanimously selected amongst others.

The onset of the monsoon heralds the commencement of the nesting season and it is a busy time for resident birds. Nests are to be built and maintained, ever demanding hatchlings need to be constantly fed and protected. Parent birds are on the go all the time. This edition's cover story by Sriram tells us about some birds seen in the monsoon season.

Four bird walks were conducted in June and it was heartening to see large number of members participating. A birding novice tells us about his birdwalk experience followed by "What's in my Camera bag". We hope you enjoy this issue. As always your feedback is welcome.

Happy Birding
Ajinkya Supekar

Hyderabad Birding Pals (HBP) is a group of bird watching enthusiasts based out of Hyderabad, united by a common love for birds. We organize free bird walks around the city of Hyderabad that are open to participation by all like-minded individuals. We are an informal group, who are passionate about bird watching and photography, learning about bird behavior (in the field) and doing our bit towards conservation of nature and its habitat as well. Do check our Facebook group to stay up to date on our bird watching events.

ARANYA

CONTENTS

	Page
June Bird Walks	04
Monsoon Calling	22
Birding Experience	29
What's in My Camera Bag	31
Notable Sightings	37
Photographer’s Corner	44

June Bird Walks

210th Bird Walk | Osman Sagar
03rd June 2018

211th Bird Walk | Narsapur Forest
10th June 2018

212th Bird Walk | Manjeera Dam
17th June 2018

214th Bird Walk | Ananthagiri Hills
24th June 2018

Osman Sagar Trip Report

By Samarth Bharadwaj

210th Bird Walk | Osman Sagar
03th June 2018

Osman Sagar (17.37°N, 78.29°E), popularly known as Gandipet lake is located on the city's periphery that supplies drinking water to the city of Hyderabad. It is a beautiful lake located 20 km west of Hyderabad and is a manmade reservoir that was created by constructing a dam across the Isa, a tributary of the Musi River. It was built in 1920 to provide a drinking water source for Hyderabad, and also to save the city from floods. It is named after Mir Osman Ali Khan, the last Nizam of Hyderabad. The road over the reservoir gates offer great views of the lake and its surroundings, and there's almost always a cool breeze in the region.

View of Osman Sagar/Gandipet lake

The day started with a cup of tea at the regular meeting point at TSPA junction at 5:30am. The weather was cloudy and comparatively cooler since it had rained the previous day. Once the cups of tea and gupshup were done, we drove off towards the lake.

A flock of Glossy Ibis welcomed us as we reached the lake at 6:30am. The habitat around the lake is full of small bushes and paddy fields that are good spots for Snipe, Pratincoles, Sandpipers, Larks etc…We saw a Gray bellied cuckoo, Baya weavers, Purple sunbird, and Indian robins near the parking area. Little grebes, lesser Whistling teals, Indian Peafowl, Red-wattled lapwings, Purple herons and Egrets were commoners.

Some members went to explore the area on the left where they spotted some Greater painted Snipe and Small Pratincoles. We observed the nesting activity of Oriental Pratincoles in the paddy fields. We were lucky to witness a territorial fight of some little ringed Plovers. Near the shore of lake, we sighted some Black tailed godwits, Black winged stilt, Little ringed plovers, Gray herons and Cattle egrets. In the paddyfield we spotted Indian Bush lark, Sykes's lark, Paddyfield pipits and ever-present Plain Prinias.

Small Pratincole *(Glareola lactea)*
By Samarth Bharadwaj

Little Ringed Plover *(Charadrius dubius)*
By Samarth Bharadwaj

As we moved further, we could see that there were a lot of fishing nets placed along the length of the shore. We saw a Purple heron that was floundering in the water, struggling to fly. Initially we thought it was tied up in some fishing thread. We then borrowed a raft made of thermocol from some local fishermen, on which Kalyan set off to retrieve the bird and bring it to the shore to untangle it. On nearing the bird to his horror Kalyan discovered that the bird actually had a swallowed a fishing hook with the line attached to it. The fishing hook had lodged itself fairly deep in the birds throat, as a result of which the bird could either have died of starvation or even worse could have ruptured the passages in the throat while trying to remove or dislodge the fishing hook, and again would have died an extremely slow and painful death. At this stage we knew that we had to handle the bird very gently, in order to not cause any further damage. Kalyan covered the bird in some sack material, which by now had resigned itself to fate and didn't put up any struggle when being handled. With the bird on board the raft, Kalyan navigated back to the shore.

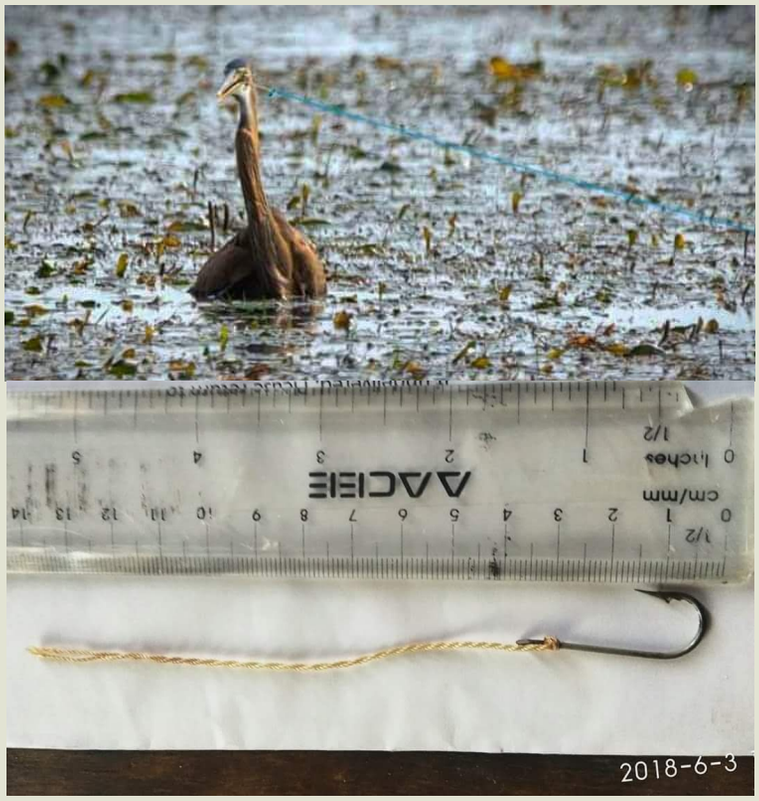
Once ashore Sundareswaran and Kalyan tried to narrow down the area where the hook had lodged itself, and then came the toughest part of being able to get the fishing hook out without further injuring the heron.

With great care and some nail biting moments the hook, which was almost 12cm long, was removed and we had managed to rescue the bird. It was truly a joy for all of us to see the bird moving and eventually fly off after extracting the hook from its throat. This was my first rescue and it felt great to have been able to save a life, which for sure would have come to a painful end, had the HBP team members not taken any action. That day I saw in practice what I have seen a lot of people preach. Kudos to Kalyan and the HBP team present there that day for their combined efforts to rescue the life of this Purple Heron bird and conserve a life/wildlife.

Shortly after this the clouds started moving in and we decided to call it a day. The amazing experience of the bird rescue, nesting activity of Oriental Pratincoles, the territorial fight of the Little ringed Plovers were the highlights of the 210th Bird walk at Osman Sagar.

eBird checklist:

https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S46260661



Oriental Pratincole *(Glareola maldivarum)*
By Samarth Bharadwaj

Purple Heron *(Ardea purpurea)* flying off after being rescued
By Balakrishna Marar

Black-winged Stilt *(Himantopus himantopus)*
By Sathiish Rao

Black-tailed Godwit *(Limosa limosa)*
By Sriram Reddy

Narsapur Forest Trip Report

By Sumant Bhattacharjee

211th Bird Walk | Narsapur Forest
10th June 2018

The Narsapur Reserve forest (17° 44'19.0"N 78°16'58.0"E) is an area spanning over 30 sq. km, located in Medak county, Telangana, and is located 50 km north of Hyderabad city. The average annual rainfall in the Narsapur region is about 150 cms. The average annual temperature is about 26.3 °C with highest temperature touching around 43 °C. Narsapur's forest bed comprises largely of red soil and the forest itself comprises of tropical deciduous trees, and is rich in flora, fauna, and avian life. The state highway (SH6) dissects the forest diagonally from southeast, and Gummadidala to the northwest. Driving on the SH6 provides a scenic view of Narsapur forest as it is flanked by tropical deciduous woodland on both sides of the road. The scenic road give you a good opportunity to view monkeys (rhesus macaque). You will find them in great numbers standing by the roadside with innocent, and perpetually curious looks.

The forest of Narsapur hosts around 230 plus avian species and is a good spot for many migratory bird species. It has a beautiful lake on the northwest perimeter of the forest that attracts migrant waterfowl like Lesser Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*), and Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*) etc. The southeast entrance car parking area is blessed by the presence of a beautiful Ayyapa Swamy temple. This beautiful thick, evergreen, forest is like lungs for the surrounding environment. The sad part is the rapid deforestation and encroachment by humans that is killing this beautiful forest each day. A great habitat for a wide variety of avifauna will soon be lost if remedial measures are not taken soon.

Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo (Surniculus dicruroides)
By Vyom Vyas

Our pre-bird walk meeting point was at the Air Force Academy Dundigul at 5.00 am. It seemed like it was going to be slightly overcast that day, however after a quick customary session of tea, we headed towards the southeast parking area. A few members joined us at the southeast parking area directly. On that day HBP had a whopping participation of fifty plus members. It is a massive milestone in HPB bird walk events. There were few new joiners. Phani let them introduce to the team. We took a group photo in front of the Ayyapa Swamy temple. On the big tree adjoining the Ayyapa Swamy temple, we sighted a couple of Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) and Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*).

Due to the large number of participants, we divided the group into multiple teams. Phani took one group out through the northwestern trail. Ajinkya and Sriram leaded their groups through the northern trail. I was in Sriram's team and we slowly started cruising through the zigzag red soiled trail. After about a 10-minute walk, we encountered an Indian nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) that took flight in a blink of an eye. We slowed down and waited. We were lucky to be able to track it and were able to get a decent sighting and shots. Manjula, Manjoy, Sriram, and others were still rejoicing the sighting when I took the decided to take a slight detour towards the westward wood where I could see an elevated contour with a dry path in between. The deciduous trees from near this area looked promising and more conducive from a photography perspective. I climbed the dried, muddy channel wall and scanned the area with an eagle eye, looking for movement in the trees and bushes. My hunch proved right it was a hot spot. Almost immediately, I saw plum-head parakeets, a male and a female (lifer), which was on my wish list before I started from home that morning.

I spotted and tracked a crested treeswift (another lifer), and then got lucky sighting a Small Minivet (another lifer). Wow, Wow, and Wow! How is wish it hadn't been an overcast day, anyhow I said to myself, there is always a next time and moved ahead. I met Mangesh on my way and I showed him the location of the crested treeswift. He was delighted and was able to get some shots. Mangesh and I were excitedly discussing the sighting of the Crested treeswift, when we saw a raptor up in the western sky. Immediately we pointed our telephoto zoom lens on the bird and went into a burst of shutter clicks. Oh boy! A Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) was riding the warm, thermals rising off the Narsapur red soiled terrain. What a sighting! We were both enthralled.

Bay-backed Shrike (Lanius vittatus)
By Bhaarat Vyas

We then began walking towards the lake that is on the northwestern perimeter of the forest. On the way, we encountered another Indian nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*). We saw a flock of Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) in the open meadows. The Narsapur Lake is amazingly picturesque with a wide-open view of the northern sky against the backdrop of hillocks. We got to see some Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), Lesser Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Cotton Pygmy Goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Asian Openbill Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), and many other species in the lake. Phani joined us back with his team on the lake embankment.

It was around 11 am and we decided to move back to the car parking area. On our way back, we saw some beautiful nests of a family of Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*). The male weavers were conscientiously weaving the nests in order to attract females and raise a family through the rainy season.

All the groups reconvened at the southeast car parking area. We exchanged our experiences and sightings in a brief animated discussion and decided to call it a day. We then returned home with some great memories to cherish from the 211th bird walk with the HBP team.

In total, we recorded a 116 bird species for the trip.

https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S46440599

Happy Birding!

Crested Treeswift (Hemiprocne coronata)
By Sriram Reddy

Red Collared-Dove (Streptopelia tranquebarica)
By Sujeet Kumar

Indian Nightjar (Caprimulgus asiaticus)
By Sriram Reddy

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (Dendrocopos mahrattensis)
By Kalyan Ineni

Black-rumped Flameback (Dinopium benghalense)
By Srinivas Kolla

White-naped Woodpecker (Chrysocolaptes festivus)
By Sujeet Kumar

Manjeera Dam Trip Report

By Ajinkya Supekar

212th Bird Walk | Manjeera Dam
17th June 2018

Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary is a riverine wetland, 50 km northwest of Hyderabad in Medak district. It is a place with a number of residents and migratory birds in addition to being home for the Marsh Crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*). It is recognized internationally as an Important Bird Area (IBA), due to its rich bird diversity and its high preference by migratory birds. Mainly, it has four habitats: marshland, tropical scrub forest, grassland and agriculture land. On the bird listing website - www.ebird.org 268 species of birds have been reported till now.

Monsoon is a great time to see the resident birds. Not because these are the only ones left to see after their migratory cousins have left, but because of their interesting behaviour and plumage change. With their activity increased with the needs of the season, it is a treat to see the birds building nests, finding food and feeding their young. This time of the year is good to see Weavers, Bitterns, Crakes and Cuckoos. These were the birds that I wished to see when we set out from the meeting point at Allwyn cross at 6 am.

As the members reached the arch of the sanctuary where roads cross, we parked the cars to take a group photo. House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*), Bengal Weavers (*Ploceus benghalensis*), Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) and White-breasted Waterhens (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) were among the first birds to be seen. This birdwalk had good number of participants, therefore we split in groups, each going to different locations. The locations being the main sanctuary (forest patch and reservoir), the three ponds (shallow linked ponds with good aquatic vegetation), the dam wall and a large pond on the right of the road with paddy fields on the left.

Bengal Weaver (Ploceus benghalensis)
By Sarath Babu Dhulipalla

Our group, Vikas Pawar, Durgaprasad S. and myself left for the sanctuary. We checked the tree cover near the habitat orientation center and it yielded Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), Coppersmith Barbet (*Psilopogon haemacephalus*) and Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*). Strangely, we didn't see a Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) which is frequently seen in this spot.

The water stream passing by and Flying Foxes added sound to the silent patch. With a quick look at the crocodiles in the breeding center, we headed to the reservoir to see the island of the mixed breeding colony of birds. I was delighted to try my hand on the Olympus spotting scope brought by Mr. Pawar. We thought it will come in handy to see the birds on the distant island. On the way, some birds drew our attention, Indian Silverbills (*Euodice malabarica*), Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*), Red-rumped Swallows (*Cecropis daurica*) were dashing through the trees and occasionally perching on trees and electric cables. The respective features of these birds: sliver bill, scales on the underparts and red (actually looking orange) on the rump were all seen and understood thanks to the bright day.

Scaly-breasted Munia (Lonchura punctulata)
By Suman Bhattacharjee

A sizable flock of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) flew towards the place we were going to. How charming they looked in the color under their wings and on their feet! We'd look for them as we went ahead. A solitary Gray-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) was calling continuously from the top of a tree. We were unable to see it because of all the foliage blocking the view. One cuckoo done, next up was Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) which fortunately held back for us to marvel it's crest and color through the scope. No calls from this one though.

Pied Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus)
By Sundar RV

Probably seeing us losing interest in order to carry forward on our way, it flew away. A Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*) was going about in the grassy area, occasionally stopping and giving a call or two. Again, this one was observed fully through the scope.

Black Drongo (Dicrurus macrocercus)
By Sathiish Rao

As we walked towards the reservoir, Zitting Cisticolas (*Cisticola juncidis*) were noisily 'zitting' up and down on the exposed aquatic plants. And, there, we saw the flamingo flock, now landed near the bank and most with their heads down, skimming the shallow water. The sight concluded by a fisherman unknowingly going towards the flock and making them fly.

It was now time to have a good look at the island in front of us. Many Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Gray Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), Egrets nested together. The dark colored sub-adults huddled up near the shore as if patiently waiting for permission from their parents to take it to the air.

The young of Gray herons didn't let their parents to be at ease. Constant demand, abnormal moves of wings and heads and cacophony of begging calls. Amidst all this, many adult painted storks were whirling above, as if they were fed up of the confusion below on tree tops. I could see some empty green painted platforms installed by the forest department along the shore. They were yet to be accepted as nesting sites by the birds. Few storks were arriving and some were departing the island and passing by. After witnessing all this, we decided to return to the habitat orientation center. On the way back, the Cisticolas were still 'zitting' and the pipit was still on the ground looking for insects. A Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) was on a tree curiously checking its food and a Gray-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) was multitasking by calling its mate and catching insects by hurriedly flying about.

Zitting Cisticola (Cisticola juncidis)
By Srinivas Kolla

We reached the habitat orientation center and sat near the stream watching the canopy above. Soon, Gopal bhaiya came back with his brother; they had been to the dam wall. He told us that he saw an Indian Spotted Eagle (*Clanga hastata*), Gray-throated Martin (*Riparia chinensis*) and Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*). All good finds.

Others came too, sighting Red Avadavats (*Amandava amandava*), Fulvous Whistling-Ducks (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), Streaked Weavers (*Ploceus manyar*), Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*), Asian Pied Starlings (*Gracupica contra*), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) and Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Zapornia fusca*) to name some.

This walk covered all the known locations in the area, thanks to the number of participants. A total of 111 species were reported.

Here's the e-bird checklist
https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S46607644

Pheasant-tailed Jacana (Hydrophasianus chirurgus)
By Latchi Raju Mantena

Ruddy-breasted Crake (Zapornia fusca)
By Balakrishna Marar

Black-headed Ibis (Threskiornis melanocephalus)
By RK Balaji

Yellow Bittern (Ixobrychus sinensis)
By Dasari Vijay

Ananthagiri Hills Trip Report

By Subrata Kool

214th Bird Walk | Ananthagiri Hills
24th June 2018

Ananthagiri hills (17.31°N, 77.86°E) is a dense forest area known for Sri Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple and for the origin of Musi river. It is located 80 km from Hyderabad close to Vikarabad town. It has deciduous forest cover with an adjoining grassland area.

Birdwalk was organized on 24 Jun 2018. Our meeting point was the bus stop next to Vikarabad signboard towards Chilkur after crossing the ORR bridges @APPA/TSSPA Junction. Most of us reached on time. After a majority of the participants reached the spot, we left for Vikarabad.

Five cars reached the spot on time, while other groups joined 15 mins after we entered the forest area. In this trip, a few new members of HBP participated, like Suhas Dey, Vasu Joshi and Khusbu Jain (who were visiting Telangana from Delhi). After the introduction of new members, Kalyan explained the "Dos" and "Don'ts". Birding started thereafter. Four young birders had also joined us. Chetan Sai, Shashank Raghuram and Vyom Vyas. Bhaarath Vyas-ji also joined with daughter Navya and wife Amee Ma'am. It was my ninth visit to this place overall. It has always surprised me with some new species. That is why I suggested Suhas to start his association with HBP from Ananthagiri.

It was a lovely sunny day and bird activity was excellent, as it rained heavily the previous night.

We started by clicking a pair of Indian Gray Hornbills that welcomed us.

While everybody was busy clicking hornbills, I and Ajinkya did a quick scan of the big banyan tree and found a Coppersmith Barbet feeding a juvenile, a few Chestnut-tailed starlings, and Sunbirds.

While coming down near the small water pool at the end of the staircase, Cinereous tits, Oriental white eyes, Tickell's blue flycatchers made us capture them with playful moments.

Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo (Surniculus dicruroides)
By Bhaarat Vyas

Next, our target was to find owls. We gathered under the big mango tree and scanned it well, but sadly this time we failed to find any.

At that point, we formed multiple groups to cover the entire area. Manjoy (joined us with his new 600mm bazooka lens!) and Manoj were getting busy clicking small birds like Oriental White-eye, Common Iora, Black-naped monarchs while Ajikya and Kalyan moved to left side of the forest.

Sarath Babu, Dasari Vijay, Srinivas Kolla, Shashi Kotte, Shantanu Mazumdar and Raju Sir(not sure) had also joined the team with Ajinkiya. Venkat VT Sir also joined with his wife and both were enjoying the nature and clicking.

I took Vyom and Suhas with me to explore the area around picnic spot. Orange-headed Thrush, White-browed Fantails were easily available there. After some 5 mins of walk inside, we experienced the breeding plumage of a male Paradise Flycatcher (rufous morph). While we were clicking that bird, we heard faint calls of Indian Pitta. A few moments later, Ajinkya also informed us to follow the calls of Pitta. We went far into the forest but we failed to reach the actual spot, as the bird had maintained a safe distance.

We returned to the main trail and by that time, we got the information from other teams that they had already spotted Gray-bellied Cuckoo, Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, Common Hawk-Cuckoo, White Bellied Drongo and Large Cuckoo Shrikes. We heard the enchanting sounds of Minivets. All of us clicked Small Minivets. Suddenly my eyes pointed to a high perch of a tree and saw the black and white bird which was none other than the Jacobin Cuckoo.

While we were experiencing the courtship behaviour of the Asian paradise flycatcher, suddenly Vyom cried out ”Raptor! Raptor!!” We clicked and found out that it was a Short-toed Snake Eagle – a lifer for both Vyom and Suhas.

Then, we decided to explore the left side of the forest which meets the grassland. Our target was to search for Nightjars. I was eagerly trying to get a clear shot, as I had narrowly missed clicking Savanah Nightjar during the last bird walk (#HBP200).

Our friend Shiva Shankar had clicked that bird, while we explored the place. In the meantime, we were already able to click a Jungle Nightjar while walking to the grassland through the forest. We had also clicked an Indian Roller and Golden Orioles.

Like all previous bird walks, this time also we gathered to get woodpeckers and this time luck was with us. All of us clicked Brown-capped pygmy Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker and as a special gift, we also got a White-naped Woodpecker.

While we were returning from the grassland area, Ajinkya called and said that they had seen a Crested Tree Swift. I was determined to take at least one perfect shot. After scanning all the eucalyptus trees, we saw on a high perch, something moving against the high winds. We thought it might be crested tree swift but a Brown-capped pygmy woodpecker surprised us. After a few minutes of waiting, we were finally able to trace a Crested Tree Swift. Unfortunately, we were only able to get some record shots

Lastly, while we were heading back towards the side of the temple, Tickell’s Blue Flycatchers, Oriental White-eyes, and Orange-headed Thrushes surprised us like dessert after a great meal!

We all gathered near the car parking area and there also we got Rose-ringed Parakeets and Shikra gave some awesome poses for us to work on.

Everybody enjoyed this trip. We were able to sight more than 85 species within four hours.

My sincere thanks to HBP.

Here’s the e-bird checklist
https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S46756635

Short-toed Snake-Eagle (Circaetus gallicus)
By Vyom Vyas

White-naped Woodpecker (Chrysocolaptes festivus)
By Satiish Rao

Oriental Magpie-Robin (Copsychus saularis)
By Srinivas Kolla

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (Cyornis tickelliae)
By Santanu Majumder

Green Bee-eater (Merops orientalis)
By Shashi Kotte

Large Cuckooshrike (Coracina macei)
By Srinivas Kolla

Monsoon Calling

By Sriram Reddy

Monsoon of the year 2015 is when I started my journey into birding. I was drawn into this hobby when I first captured the beauty of Greater flamingos at Osman sagar lake. Though I knew some basics of photography, I was completely naive when it came to birding.

July is when the monsoon season is most active in South India, and I was fortunate to photograph the Jacobin or Pied cuckoo and Painted francolin during my initial birding trips. After a few months, I started looking for Jacobin cuckoo and Painted francolin again, but I couldn't see them in winter. This made me ask questions about these birds habits which lead me to some interesting facts. One such interesting fact I came to know, was that the Jacobin or Pied cuckoo is the harbinger of monsoons in India. When the first Pied cuckoo of the season is spotted, the rains won't be far behind.

Painted francolin (Francolinus pictus)

Jacobin cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus)

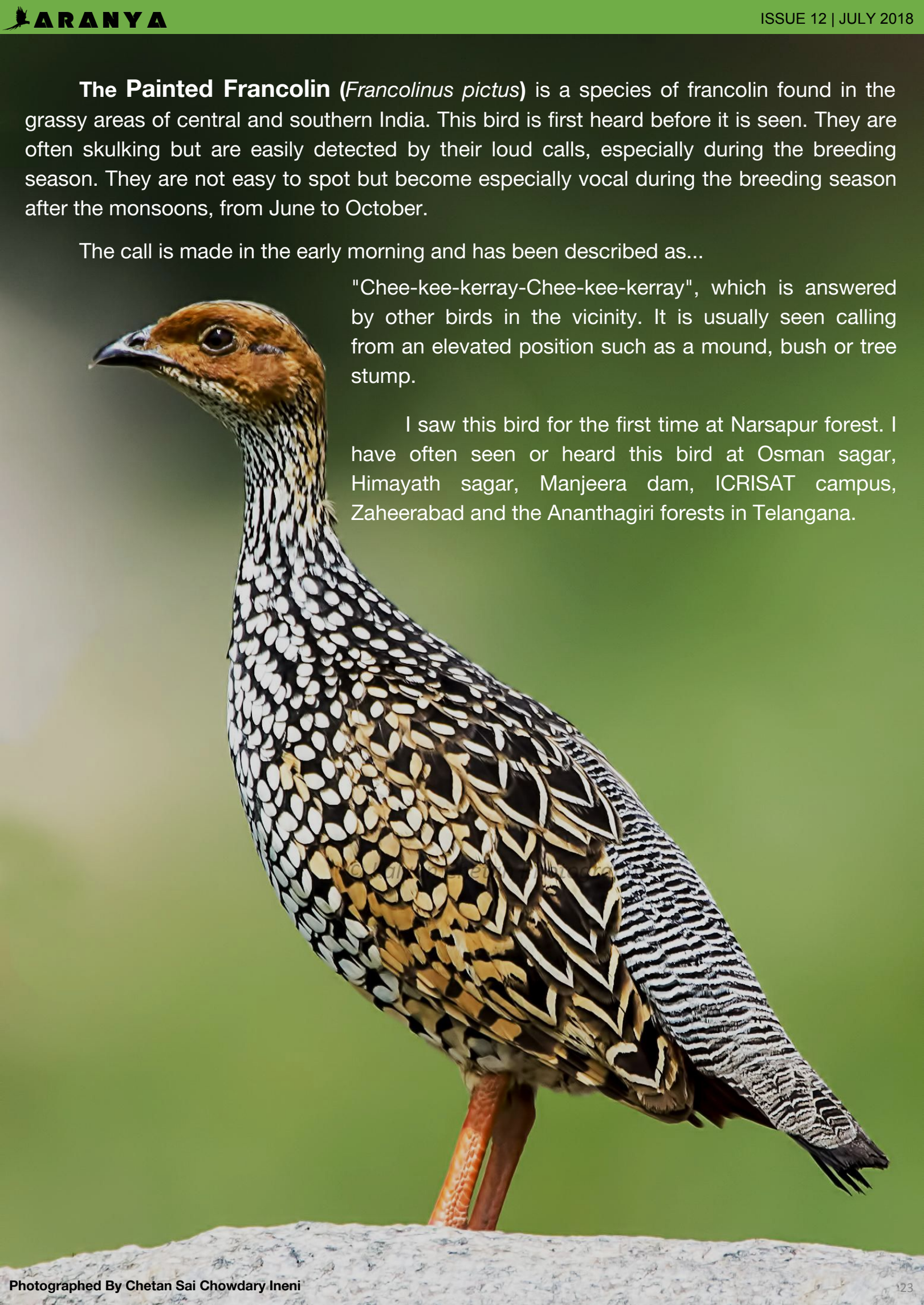
Many birders and photographers think monsoons are a lean sighting period. However, the arrival of monsoon, gives birdwatchers and photographers an opportunity to see some important bird species and some interesting bird behaviour as well. Painted francolins, Rain quails and Indian pittas turn highly vocal. During the onset of summer continuing till the monsoon, there is a massive influx of cuckoo species. Cuckoos are good singers and are often heard in the field first than seen. This is also the best season to watch the dance of Indian peafowl!

The Painted Francolin (*Francolinus pictus***)** is a species of francolin found in the grassy areas of central and southern India. This bird is first heard before it is seen. They are often skulking but are easily detected by their loud calls, especially during the breeding season. They are not easy to spot but become especially vocal during the breeding season after the monsoons, from June to October.

The call is made in the early morning and has been described as...

"Chee-kee-kerray-Chee-kee-kerray", which is answered by other birds in the vicinity. It is usually seen calling from an elevated position such as a mound, bush or tree stump.

I saw this bird for the first time at Narsapur forest. I have often seen or heard this bird at Osman sagar, Himayath sagar, Manjeera dam, ICRISAT campus, Zaheerabad and the Ananthagiri forests in Telangana.



Photographed By Chetan Sai Chowdary Ineni

The **Rain Quail (***Coturnix coromandelica***)** is a species of quail found in the Indian subcontinent. This bird too is highly vocal during the monsoons, and is often seen in small flocks that flush together. Common in plains, croplands, grasslands and scrub jungles. It is generally seen hiding in grasslands. It's breeding season is from March to October, but chiefly after the break of the southwest monsoon in June. This is a bird which is difficult to see in other seasons.

To see the rain quail, it is important to recognise it's fast two noted call - CHRINK!\ CHRINK, CHRINK!\ CHRINK. Best time to see them is in the monsoon mornings, when you see them calling continuously, sometimes on an elevated position such as a mound or on top of a rock.

I saw this bird for the first time at the ICRISAT campus. Later I have seen or heard this bird at Osmansagar, Himayathsagar, ICRISAT campus and near Manjeera dam in Telangana.

Photographed By Manjula Desai

The Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) is a passerine bird native to the Indian subcontinent. It inhabits scrub jungle, deciduous and dense evergreen forest. Although very colourful, they are usually shy and hidden in the undergrowth where they hop and pick insects on the forest floor. It forages on ground but sings and roosts in trees.

They have a distinctive two-note whistling call WEEE-\TYIu which may be heard at dawn and dusk. Migrates to south at the end of rainy season and returns with the advancement of the southwest monsoon. It breeds mainly from May to July.

This bird is usually seen from the end of Summer in Telangana. I saw this bird for the first time at Ananthagiri forest. I have often seen or heard this bird at Ananthagiri forest, near Umamaheshwaram temple, Manjeera dam and Bejjur forest in Telangana.

The Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) is a species of jacana. Jacanas are a group of waders in the family Jacanidae that are identifiable by their wide feet and claws which enable them to walk on floating vegetation in shallow lakes, which are their preferred habitat. The pheasant-tailed jacana is capable of swimming, although it usually walks on the vegetation. The females are more colourful than the males. These jacanas breed on floating vegetation from March to July. In southern India, it breeds in the monsoon season, June–September.

I have seen this bird near Ameenpur, Manjeera dam, ICRISAT campus and Narsapur forest.

If winters are the best time to spot and photograph exotic migratory birds, monsoons are more about resplendent native birds which add beauty to the nature that is draped in a green carpet. What adds to the charm of photography in monsoons is, it gives photographers an opportunity to click these birds in beautiful lush-green landscapes. Spotting and clicking pictures of colourful birds with a green background or birds roosting on a dry perch amidst slight drizzle is a rare treat and something we get to see only in this season.

Black-crested bulbul (Pycnonotus flaviventris)

Red-whiskered bulbul (Pycnonotus jocosus)

Talking about the safety precautions one needs to take while birdwatching in monsoons, is to protect your equipment and ensure that they are properly covered in waterproof packaging.

Ensure proper footwear to protect yourself from insect bites, leeches and snakes.

During monsoon, it is always fun to photograph birds from inside the vehicle. But, make sure that your vehicle doesn't get stuck in muddy puddles and pools of water!

Birding experience

By B Krishna Mohan

I am a newbie to birding. A chance visit to the Hyderabad Birding Pals group on Facebook made me dive into the marvellous world of feathered friends. The number of bird walks that I attended is small, but they have given me immense learnings.

Here is what I have learnt:

It takes some discipline to do birding. First, it is about the time. You have to be a morning person to spot the birds in action. It makes it easier to shoot, particularly the profile shots when the light is at a slant. From being an insomniac, I am now able to time my sleep to wake up early. Once up, I cannot slip into sleep again. This, I am using for my morning walks, which is needed to beat my if-you-ignore-you-will-face-consequences obesity.

While having a bigger lens helps in getting up close, I also learnt that it really is not the thing. A 55-250mm, a 70-200mm will also come in handy. With an option to shoot in raw, a cropped version will be able to do justice to the image. A camera is not mandatory at all. Having a pair of binoculars is more suited. A few weeks into birding, I am stuck with gear acquisition syndrome. I enquired what others used and dreamt of owning the biggest and (read as costliest) ones. Then my peers told me that it is not about gear. However, in my journey, I found a used 100-400 mm and a tripod, at a price that did not leave a deep hole in my pocket.

Purpose and aesthetics

The bird walks serve many purposes. For the pro-birders, it is the genus and species that matters. However, it does not mean that they do not click the commonly visible aves. My first bird that I clicked was a green bee-eater, one of the most easily available and visible bird. The recent sighting is a Jacobin cuckoo, which has the epithet of being the harbinger of monsoon. It is also popularly known as Pied cuckoo. That is a lifer to me. In birding parlance, a lifer is a bird that one sees for the first time. Then there is a record shot. This is finding a new bird or one that is rare to sight. Thus the scoreboard, in days to come, will read something like 100 lifers, 23 record shots. Of course, there are already some nearing 300 lifers (long way to go!).

The sight of a Pied Cuckoo is an indication that the southwest monsoon is active or is just round the corner. Of course, it is nearly three weeks that I have spotted the bird but experienced the petrichor only last week. The big find for me is the peafowl, male of the species, with its exquisite plumage. The cloudy sky cooled the environs and it came out dancing, to woo its mating partner. While I could not manage to click the national bird when it danced, I did manage to get the full bird and its flowing feathers in one frame. That is a lifer again. That way, almost every bird is a lifer for me; I was oblivious to most of the birds; barring the crows and sparrows.

Safety First

While the destination, which is often a far off location, is beautiful, the journey is no less beautiful or no less important. In the zeal to reach the destination, I was once foolish to put safety to the altar. I did not negotiate the steep curve and my Bullet continued with inertia of motion and direction and was descending into a trench. I applied the brakes suddenly. Before I realised, I was on the ground. The pillion rider too fell. We both landed our feet first and allowed the heavy bike to fall on us. Helmets saved the day for us. We waited for few other road users to assist us. Later, I realised that camera's vertical grip suffered a few cracks under the impact. Luckily, the camera is still functional.

Jacobin cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus)
By B Krishna Mohan

Presentation:

I have learnt that it is not required to post all the pictures online; at least on a single day. This, I have been told, will ensure that works of all members get the eyeballs. I have realised that bird photography is like any other niche photography - it should have the required photo elements - tight composition with a clutter-free foreground and clean background. Patience alone matters here.

Treasure in and around:

My previous office had a decent library. They wanted to get rid of old books. I picked one- 'The Book Of Indian Birds' by Salim Ali. I never read it - felt the book had nothing to offer to an average reader. The birding experience proved me wrong. That book is now a guide. While I was always a photographer, now I am refining my skills. And for the time being, Alwal, where I stay, is my playground.

Indian Peafowl (Pavo cristatus)
By B Krishna Mohan

What's in My Camera Bag?

Fareed Mohmed

Hello readers my name is Fareed Mohmed, a Mechanical Engineer by profession with a passion for Robotics, Automation, Birds and Photography. My journey into photography began in the year 2015. I was using a cell phone camera and this further fuelled my passion. I purchased my first DSLR camera in the same year.

Initially I tried my hand at multiple subjects like landscapes, insects, butterflies, and flowers before settling with bird photography. Learning photography has taken me to many new places, helped me make many new friends and also gave me the opportunity to be a part of HBP, with whom I have done many birdwalks and trips that has only helped my learning curve when it comes to birds and bird photography.

Horseshoe bend, Nokia Lumia 1020

Nikon D7200

This is my second camera body that I bought, back in 2016 and to this day is my default camera body that I use and I'm very happy with it. The Nikon D7200 is a gentle refresh of an excellent camera the D7100. The sensor sees improvements in dynamic range, the AF works in lower light and the continuous shooting buffer lets you make use of its class-leading subject tracking. The slow live view autofocus and awkward lack of aperture control during movie shooting means it's not as flexible as some of its rivals but it's a formidable DSLR all the same.

Nikon D7200 key features

- 24.2MP CMOS sensor with no optical low-pass filter
- Multi-CAM 3500DX II 51-point AF system, all sensitive to -3EV
- 2,016-pixel RGB metering sensor, used for 3D subject tracking in AF-C
- ISO 100-25,600, with ISO 51,200 and 102,400 black and white modes
- 6 fps continuous shooting (7 fps in 1.3x crop mode) with increased buffer depth
- 1/8000 sec maximum shutter speed
- 3.2", 1.2M dot RGBW LCD display
- 1080/60p video (1.3x crop only) with clean output over HDMI and Flat Picture Control
- Dual SD card slots
- Wi-Fi with NFC
- Magnesium alloy weather-sealed body

Nikon 200-500 f5.6 VR

This is a recent addition to my kit and I absolutely love the sharpness and colour boost I got using this over my other lenses. The vibration reduction on this one allows me to take great shots even at 1/40 shutter speed. A little bulky over my Tamron 150-600 but well worth it. I don't think I will be needing another bird lens anytime soon.

Main Features:

- Compact super telephoto zoom lens for birding, wildlife, motorsports, events and more
- 500mm of zoom power on FX-format DSLRs; 750mm equivalent on DX-format DSLRs
- Fast f/5.6 constant aperture for beautiful out-of-focus backgrounds and low-light performance
- ~4.5 stops of Vibration Reduction with Sports mode
- AF compatible with optional TC-14E series teleconverters and DSLRs that offer f/8 support

Tamron 150-600 G1

I purchased the Tamron SP 150-600 VC lens in 2016, when this was the default birding lens for most bird photographers. This lens provides great zoom and delivers sharp results around f 8-9 under good lighting conditions. This is still my backup lens and parting with it seems difficult. The Tamron SP 150-600 VC lens strikes a great balance between performance, price, and size/weight.

For many amateur and enthusiast photographers who were waiting for a reasonably affordable lens for bird and nature photography the Tamron SP 150-600 VC can be a 'game changer' for them. There is nothing else on the market that delivers 600mm reach on a full frame camera (EFoV of 900 mm on a DX body) at this price point. Period.

Tamron SP AF 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro

Apart from Birds I love to Photograph Insects and Butterflies, the Tamron 90 mm Macro is my go to lens for all my Macro needs. Light in weight quick to focus and beautiful results. The only downside to this is absence of Vibration reduction.

Nokia Lumia 1020

The Nokia Lumia 1020 comes with a 41 Megapixel camera (yes, you read it right and it's not a typo). This is one of the biggest reasons why I am a photographer today. I've been using this device since 2015. It comes with ISO, Shutter Speed, Depth of Field, Exposure compensation adjustments and serves well as a starting point into the wide world of Photography. I still carry it with me. This takes decent landscapes and Macro shots.

Mottled Wood Owl, Nikon D7200, Nikon 200-500

White Rumped Shama, D7200 Nikon 200-500

Red Velvet Mite, D7200, Tamron 90mm Macro

Valparai, D3300, Nikon 18-55

Notable Sightings

Fork-tailed drongo-cuckoo *Surniculus dicruroides*
Narsapur Forest - Telangana

Notable Sightings

© Sriram Reddy

Tawny eagle *Aquila rapax*
Zaheerabad, Telangana

Notable Sightings

© Abhishek Ravindra

Hodgson's frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni*
Manipur

Notable Sightings

© Karnakar Reddy Thatikonda

Jungle bush quails *Perdicula asiatica*
Narsapur forest, Telangana

Notable Sightings

© Dasari Vijay

Crested treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*
Ananthagiri forest, Telangana

Notable Sightings

© Mathew Joseph

Common buttonquail *Turnix sylvaticus*
Sultanpur flats, Haryana

Notable Sightings

© Syamala Rupakula

Barred buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*
Ameenpur Lake, Telangana

Photographer's Corner

Sarus crane *(Grus antigone)*
Dhanauri wetlands, Greater Noida, Delhi NCR

© Mathew Joseph

Photographer's Corner

Purple sunbird *(Cinnyris asiaticus)*
Osman Sagar, Telangana

© Siddha Namachi

Photographer's Corner

Black-breasted weaver *(Ploceus benghalensis)*
Manjeera, Telangana

© Sidhu Varma

Photographer's Corner

Little egret *(Egretta garzetta)*
Ameenpur, Telangana

© RK Balaji

Photographer's Corner

Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse *(Pterocles exustus)*
Osman Sagar, Telangana

© Sriram Reddy

ARANYA

Indian pitta (*Pitta brachyura*)
By Sriram Reddy

Hyderabad Birding Pals